

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	COME-00	CTME-00	INL-00
DODE-00	DOEE-00	PERC-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	EUR-00	
EXIM-01	OIGO-00	E-00	VCI-00	FRB-00	H-00	TEDE-00	
INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00	M-00	VCIE-00	
DCP-00	NRC-00	NSAE-00	ISN-00	NSCE-00	OES-00	OIC-00	
OMB-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	MCC-00	GIWI-00	ISNE-00	FMPC-00	
SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	BHG-00	
EPAE-00	IIP-00	SCRS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00	
NFAT-00	SAS-00	SWCI-00	/004W				

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FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2727

INFO AMEMBASSY ABUJA

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY KAMPALA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

USMISSION GENEVA

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L NDJAMENA 001761

SIPDIS

FOR AF ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRAZER, DRL ASSISTANT SECRETARY LOWENKRON, AND NSC SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR COURVILLE FROM AMBASSADOR WALL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/01/2010

TAGS: EFIN ENRG EPEP KDEM PGOV PHUM PREL CD

SUBJECT: THE MANY FACES (AND LIVES) OF PRESIDENT IDRISSE DEBY

Classified By: Ambassador Marc M. Wall for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. President Idriss Deby at year's end is perhaps more besieged than he has ever been in his fifteen years in power. He is confronting a rash of desertions, raids on military targets, and violent student demonstrations. Even his most respected family members are joining the opposition. But Deby is fighting back with a brazen show of defiance, reorganizing his military, taking frequent trips abroad, delivering combative public statements, and lashing out at domestic insurgents, the World Bank, and anyone else he sees standing in his way. How long Deby can hang on is anyone's guess, but he is not ready to give up the fight, and key elements of his power base remain (barely) intact. Even now, we would not count him out. We believe it still serves our interests to encourage a peaceful transition, while not harboring false hopes that, in Deby's present state of mind, he will be especially receptive to our message. END SUMMARY

Deby's Sea of Troubles

¶2. (SBU) President Deby has had no respite from challenges to his rule since his return to N'Djamena November 11 after an extended stay in eastern Chad. He had spent weeks in his redoubt in Abeche seeking to stamp out a rebellion by deserters led by Yaya Dillo, his young cousin and a former coup plotter. Having relieved his army chief of staff of his duties for refusing orders to fire on the rebels, Deby only just avoided the unpardonable offense in Zagawa culture of shedding the blood of his fellow clansmen. Instead the two sides successfully executed a charade with the army pretending to fight and the renegade forces pretending to defend themselves. In the end, the insurgents were allowed to escape across the border into Sudan unscathed.

¶3. (SBU) In the weeks since then, Deby has had to deal with attacks on arms depots in N'Djamena and Koundoul, a training base south of town; raids on government installations in the eastern towns of Adre, Guereda, and Amnabak; large-scale military desertions; and student riots in the southern towns of Bongor and Pala. Perhaps the most stinging challenge to Deby personally was the release December 8 of the manifesto by the twins Tom and Timan Erdimi, his cousins and respected family elders, declaring open opposition to his regime.

Deby Comes Out Swinging

14. (SBU) Evidently believing that the best defense is a good offense, Deby has been defiant in his response. After the attacks on the military compounds in N'Djamena and Koundoul, Deby dissolved the Republican Guard, the military branch that was supposed to be an elite force but had actually been the seedbed for the plots against him in May 2004 and Yaya Dillo's more recent attempt. On November 15, he announced the reshuffling of his military leadership. He shifted the army chief of staff who had disobeyed orders to shoot in October to be military advisor in the Presidency and elevated a well-respected Southerner to the top military command position. He also replaced the heads of the National Police and the Nomadic Guard.

15. (SBU) Deby's troubles at home have not kept him from traveling abroad. He spent much of the last week of November on a trip to Brussels and Paris. He was in Bamako December 2-4 for the French-African summit and in Mecca December 7-8 for a conference of Islamic leaders. In Paris, he appealed to President Chirac for military assistance and France's intervention on his behalf in his dispute with the World Bank on plans to revise the oil revenue management law.

The Fighter Speaks Out

16. (U) Deby has pulled no punches in his many public statements over the last month. At a rally organized by the ruling party in the dusty square in front of the Presidential Palace November 16, he denounced all challengers to his authority. At one point, he proclaimed that just because he had taken power in N'Djamena from the East in 1990 did not mean that any new "adventurer" would be able to get away with it now. In this speech and in an interview on Radio France Internationale broadcast November 28, he pointedly accused Khartoum of aiding and abetting Chadian rebels against him.

17. (U) Although he did not speak at the ceremony December 1 commemorating the anniversary of his march into N'Djamena to take power fifteen years before (the so-called "Deby Day"), he proudly observed the public rituals of reviewing the troops, laying the wreath at the memorial shrine, and sitting prominently in the reviewing stands. Unlike previous such events, he finished the festivities by taking a victory lap standing with his head sticking through the open roof of his humvee and waving at the surrounding crowds.

18. (U) Deby the politician and Deby the diplomat were on full display at the celebration of the "Day of Liberty and Democracy" on December 10 in Fada, a town in his stronghold in Chad's northeast desert. Deby led off the hour-long speech thanking Libya, France, and the United States for their help with projects in Fada. He proceeded into a lengthy summary of his achievements and plans for building schools, clinics, and roads. He spoke up for girls' education and condemned abuse of children in some koranic schools. He denied supporting Sudanese rebels in Darfur and affirmed hopes for peaceful relations with Khartoum. He had soothing remarks about his commitment to fighting poverty, talking with opponents, and managing public finances transparently.

19. (U) But Deby the fighter broke through in his impassioned comments on his determination to stamp out threats to internal stability. And as in his statements of November 16 and November 28, he saved his choicest words for the World Bank. He insisted he would change the oil revenue management law as he saw fit and defy any effort by the World Bank or any other outsider to dictate terms that interfered with Chad's sovereignty. He provocatively accused the World Bank of having nothing to show for its massive investment in Chad over the years.

But How Long Can He Hold On?

10 (C) As Deby has shown many times before, when in trouble, he fights. And his fighter's instincts are engaged now, perhaps as never before. No one in Chad is better at intimidating, out-scheming, or buying off his rivals. His survival prospects will be shaped by four factors: his health, his family, his army, and his relations with Khartoum. Despite a bad liver, war wounds, and libertine personal habits, his public appearances over the last month suggest that he is in fighting trim. Despite even the defection of the Erdimi twins, he can count on his family knowing that if he falls, it falls too. Thus he knows the family will not rashly risk a violent rupture. Despite

desertions and attacks by isolated bands of dissidents, Deby's core base of support in the army still seems to remain in place, albeit tenuously. We leave it to others to assess Khartoum's intentions, but the accusations traded by each

side of support by the other for its enemies have not so far led to overt confrontation. Any of these elements could crumble under Deby's feet at any time, but for now the ground seems to be holding firm enough to allow him to hang on to power. Even now, we would not count him out.

What Can the United States Do?

¶11. (C) It is not necessarily the best time to try to talk with a leader about democratic change when he is fighting for his life and still thinks he has a chance at surviving. We believe it is nevertheless worth trying. Our interests in counter-terrorism, refugees, Darfur peace talks, and oil suggest we should. We will thus continue to seek opportunities to raise our concerns with Deby privately and to speak out publicly. We will continue to work to strengthen democratic institutions, improve governance, and reform the military. As we have recommended in the past, these efforts would be bolstered by a clear statement of our policy on president-for-life wannabees; more contacts for Deby with senior U.S. officials; efforts to engage the Europeans and Africans; and under certain circumstances, an invitation for a White House visit.

¶12. (C) But we do not hold out much hope at this stage that Deby would be receptive to these overtures. In the fierce desert culture he grew up in and lives in still, pride and honor are everything. The threats against him only make him more determined to fight. The French, who tell us they have tried to tempt Deby with offers of sinecures and handsome apartments, are convinced he will never leave Chad. As some describe him here, he is like a baobab tree: he will remain upright as long as he can and topple only after he is dead or pushed over.

¶13. (C) Coming as close as he has so far in declaring his intentions to remain in power for another five-year term, Deby ended his speech in Fada December 10 by announcing to cheers that he would meet his countrymen at next year's festivities to be held in Kyabe, a town in southern Chad. As the men on camels and horses were riding onto the parade ground afterwards, the Ambassador turned to the French Ambassador sitting next to him and noted that Deby does not seem like a man ready to leave the scene. The French Ambassador replied: "only when he is dead." Unfortunately, he may be right.
WALL

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